

Bandera Independent School District Bandera, Texas

Case Study: Texas District Forecasts and Shapes Student Achievement With PASeries From Pearson

Bandera, Texas, located 40 miles northwest of San Antonio, is known as “the cowboy capital of world,” a place with an independent spirit and an eye toward innovation. At Bandera Independent School District (ISD), teachers and administrators are using technology to forecast how their students will achieve and finding that when they can see the future, they can change it.

In this district of four schools and more than 2,500 students hailing from a wide geographic area, achievement is high, with test scores exceeding state averages. Seventy-five percent of the students are Caucasian, and 23 percent are Hispanic; 41 percent qualify for the free or reduced lunch program.

To monitor student progress in preparation for the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) and to take teaching and learning to the next level, district administrators adopted Progress Assessment Series® (PASeries®) from Pearson, the first formative assessment product designed to measure progress and forecast student growth toward state performance goals and grade-level expectations.

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**- Richard Grill, Assistant Superintendent
of Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment
Bandera Independent School District**

“We brought in PASeries because it’s a good product to identify students who are struggling and to provide support for them in a more targeted way,” said

Richard Grill, Bandera ISD’s assistant superintendent of curriculum, instruction and assessment. “It helps us see, ‘Is what I’m teaching and what I’m testing learned?’ That’s the whole crux of assessment. We teach, we test and then we teach in a different way until each student has mastered those objectives.”

Pre-built and research-based, PASeries for Reading, Mathematics, Algebra I and Writing help teachers of grades three through 12 connect classroom instruction to results while helping states and school districts meet increasing demands for accountability. All PASeries test items were developed based on an extensive review of national and state standards and tests, as well as curriculum and instructional practices.

Two years ago, Bandera ISD began using PASeries Mathematics for grades three through five, and the district has been expanding its use since then. It will fully implement PASeries next year – for reading and math in grades three through eight, and for Algebra I at the high school level. “Now everyone wants to use PASeries in all subject areas, because they see it is a more efficient way to test,” said Grill.

PASeries has been “the most dynamic and useful tool” as students and teachers have embarked on the online teaching environment, said Grill. “It has given us forecast data and allowed us to do a better job with instruction. We’ve learned that if we do a good job, we’re going to do a good job with assessment. We’ve asked our teachers not to worry about the TAKS but rather to focus on preparing students in the best way, and PASeries has helped us define how to do that.”

In addition, PASeries has been an integral part of testing the district's technology infrastructure, said Grill. "We're using it, in part, to see the difficulties in scheduling large numbers of our student body to take online tests, as a catalyst for change. It has helped us make sure our technology is ready."

Grill said as the district expands its technology infrastructure, the goal is to be able to test every student in the district on the same day. Bandera ISD has paved the way for achieving that goal, he said. "In the past, we had to ask students and teachers to stay off the Internet when we did our testing. Now the school district doesn't have to shut down its operations when it's testing online."

When launching PASeries, Grill wanted the process to be as nonthreatening as possible. "We were very purposeful in communicating that we would be monitoring activity, but there would be no accountability," he said. At first, there was some apprehension, as teachers feared their students would score poorly. "But that wasn't the case. Once we started getting results and they saw the forecast reports were very accurate, there was buy-in everywhere."

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To conduct the testing, Bandera ISD uses a mobile computer lab called Computers on Wheels (COWS). "We roll those COWS into the classrooms, and the testing begins," said Grill. "While no one likes to be tested, our students are more focused online than on a paper-pencil test. The interaction of the technology and the test-taking tools keeps them engaged, so they like the testing better." And students are making

fewer mistakes, because the opportunities for improperly "bubbling in" answers are removed, he added.

When they receive the data, teachers and administrators group students with similar weaknesses for remediation and take advantage of teaching style differences, he explained. "That's why we're seeing such good student success – we're using the data."

Justine Horvath, math interventionist teacher at the district's Hill Country Elementary, uses PASeries to diagnose weaknesses when students are having difficulty passing benchmarks. She gives students a "screener" and five progress tests spread across the school year. "We are seeing growth," she said. "PASeries provides valuable information, and we get a lot out of it."

Horvath said she and her colleagues have been working for years to find "true benchmarks." With PASeries, they now know what their students need to learn, she said. "This gives us information in advance of what we need to cover."

Teachers share the data with students so they can see where they are and what they need to do to reach their goals, which motivates students, she said. Parents, too, are brought into the loop, as they receive forecasts of their children's achievement. When a test is coming up, parents ask how prepared their children are.

"We've been very happy with PASeries," she said. "It's quick, accurate, and we are pleased with the outcome."

"We are very pleased with the similarity between the forecast and TAKS scores,"

**- Lillian Butcher, Campus Test Coordinator
Alkek Elementary**

Lillian Butcher, campus test coordinator at Alkek Elementary, said she and other teachers at Alkek are finding PASeries very helpful in predicting achievement and directing teaching instruction. "We are very pleased with the similarity between the forecast and TAKS scores," she said.

Previously, she would plot out line graphs by hand to predict how students would achieve and then try to determine how to remediate problem areas. "I've always used that kind of information, but with PASeries, it's far more efficient than I ever was and gets a much bigger job done."

Bandera ISD's foray into online testing with PASeries is paying off. Test scores are steadily rising every year, with the Texas Education Agency naming Bandera ISD's schools "exemplary" and "recognized." For example, 92 percent of the district's fourth-graders are achieving at grade level or above on the TAKS, while the state average is 84. Grill attributes the district's success to its leaders' "willingness to take risks and learn when there are no high stakes on the table," he said.

Grill is looking forward to Bandera ISD's continued success, as he is about to take on a new role as superintendent of Sabinal ISD, a neighboring district. "I believe in PASeries so much that I'm taking it with me," he said. "I'll get to prove that this isn't a fluke – that it will help Sabinal be more efficient and effective, too. It's exciting for me as I start leading a district to have the tools to help us perform at our academic best."

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